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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CONAKRY 000210

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SUBJECT: POLITICAL PARTY LEADER PEDDLES UTOPIAN VISION FOR
GUINEA

Classified By: A/DCM SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. An emerging Guinean politician, Amcit Abe Sylla, is peddling a utopian vision of economic progress for the country. He claims that he can turn Guinea around in five years, and have it sitting at the table with the G7 in twenty as a donor nation. Although his economic reasoning is likely sound, Sylla does not seem to have a good grasp of Guinea's political realities. At the same time, his name continues to come up in discussions with various contacts, suggesting that he is finding some political traction. If he is peddling these concepts to the CNDD, they may very well be buying into some or all of Sylla's vision. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Since the December 23 coup d'etat, Abe Sylla (Amcit) has been increasingly active in Guinea's political arena. Pol/Econ Chief met with Sylla on April 7 to discuss his new political party, the New Generation for the Republic (NGR), as well as his vision for the country.

BIO NOTES

¶3. (C) Abe Sylla is a naturalized U.S. citizen who has lived in the United States for more than 40 years. He was born in 1951 in Kindia, Guinea where he spent his childhood. After immigrating to the United States, he earned a Bachelor's and Master's degree in electrical engineering at the University of Maryland. He is married and has two adult daughters.

¶4. (C) Sylla is believed to hold considerable personal as well as business wealth. His company, AIS Engineering, specializes in telecommunications and information technology, and has provided services to the U.S. Government, including the Departments of Defense and State. On the company website, AIS states that it holds contracts to provide diplomatic communication services to a number of U.S. Embassies. The company also handles the ECOWAS communications network (ERIES). A review of open source materials indicates that Sylla contributed \$1,500 to President Obama's campaign fund and another \$2,000 to Congressman Wynn's campaign fund in 2008. In 2004, he contributed a total of \$1,410 to the Republican party.

TURNING GUINEA AROUND

¶5. (C) Abe Sylla told Pol/Econ Chief that he decided to enter the Guinean political arena because he believes that he can "turn the country around." He explained how he knows first-hand what Guinea looked like before independence, and how much the country's economic situation has subsequently deteriorated over the last fifty years. However, Sylla feels that Guinea's current political leaders are ill equipped to address the challenges ahead. "They all have good ideas and

good intentions, but no real solutions." According to Sylla, his personal success in the business world has provided him with the experience needed to run a country, and to provide the solutions that are so desperately needed.

SEND IN THE REPAIR TEAM

16. (C) When asked about his new political party, the NGR, Sylla explained that it is really much more than a political party. "We are a team of professionals, such as teachers, engineers, and lawyers, who want to come in to Guinea and fix its problems...we can train these young kids how to govern, establish rule of law, and then turn it over to a new generation of leadership...they just need help," Sylla said. He clarified that this team of experts is comprised primarily of members of the Guinean Diaspora living in the United States and Europe.

A UTOPIAN VISION

17. (C) Sylla claimed that he could "turn Guinea around" in just five years, making it the industrial equivalent to "at least Belgium." He then outlined a vision for achieving this goal, which focuses primarily on developing the country's hydroelectric potential. "Water is the key...if we can just harness that energy, we can eradicate poverty." Sylla said that with such development, Guinea would have an excess supply of electricity that it could then export throughout

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the region. Once Guinea reaches that level of production, Sylla said he could move into the second and third phases of his plan.

18. (C) For the second phase, Guinea could begin to use its newfound hydroelectric surplus to process the bauxite reserves that are currently exported elsewhere for costly processing. The third phase would involve using "water wealth" to transform the agricultural sector, making Guinea a net exporter of rice. Sylla's final phase, or "wheel" as he termed it, would be the tourism industry, which he claimed would grow exponentially due to the thousands of expatriates who would be living in Guinea as a result of the success of the first three phases.

19. (C) When the discussion turned to an implementation strategy, Sylla said he would probably need to use foreign labor, "maybe Thais, Filipinos, or Chinese," for the first five to ten years since Guineans currently lack the necessary skill sets. However, Sylla said that the success of the project would enable the government to start investing heavily in the education sector in order to develop the country's labor capacity.

EARNING A SEAT AT THE G7 TABLE

10. (C) At this point, Sylla went on at length about revenue projections, although his reasoning as to how he came up with these figures was unclear. He estimated that in five to ten years, Guinea would be generating more than \$10 billion in annual revenues through the power, mining, agricultural, and tourism sectors. Of this \$10 billion, Sylla claimed that the government would really only need \$4 billion to provide for the needs of its citizens, leaving \$6 billion that could then be invested in the world market. Based on this model, Sylla said that "Guinea will be sitting at the table with the G7 in twenty years because it will have become a donor country."

CANDIDACY UNCLEAR

¶11. (C) In response to a question as to why a naturalized American citizen would want to get involved in Guinean politics, Sylla said that he had already done everything in his life and was looking for a challenge. He emphasized that he doesn't need any more money and that Guinea really does need help. However, Sylla acknowledged "I don't even know this country, I don't know what the hell I'm getting myself into."

¶12. (C) Pol/Econ Chief asked if Sylla had declared his candidacy for president, to which Sylla replied that he had not. When asked if he planned to declare, he said "we are working out the details."

CLEAN OUT THE GOVERNMENT AND THEN START OVER

¶13. (C) In response to Sylla's outlined political/economic vision, Pol/Econ Chief commented that some critics might find his proposal too optimistic. Sylla agreed, but said that "someone has to have a vision." He acknowledged that the proposal might seem utopian, but he was convinced that it was doable. Pol/Econ Chief also raised questions about how his plan would get around the persistent corruption that has crippled development for decades. Sylla said that the only way to move forward is to establish rule of law, good governance, and strong democratic institutions. In order to achieve these objectives, Sylla said that the only solution is to "double the salary of every government employee, thank them for their service, and ask them to stay home...I would do that and then bring in my own team to run the government."

DADIS IS JUST MISUNDERSTOOD

¶14. (C) On the question of CNDD President Moussa Dadis Camara, Sylla said "he is a good kid, but perhaps misguided." He said that although Dadis is not really solving any of the country's problems, he is popular because he is tackling issues that resonate with the population. When asked if he had personally met with Dadis, Sylla said that Dadis had requested a meeting but that Sylla had refused to go to Camp Alpha Yaya. "If he wants to meet with me, I told him that he

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needs to come to my office," Sylla said.

¶15. (C) Sylla then heaped criticism on Guinean civil society and the international community, including the United States Government. He said "Dadis wants to leave, but no one is listening to him...he got up on national television and said he was willing to step down in three months, but no one paid him any attention." When Pol/Econ Chief asked Sylla how he thought the international community should have reacted to this statement, Sylla said "you should have said okay, offered him and his family political amnesty, and then helped him to find a position elsewhere, like in an NGO or a private company." Pol/Econ Chief explained current USG policy toward Guinea at length, and in particular, our zero tolerance for a military regime and the individuals responsible for perpetuating it.

¶16. (C) Before leaving, Sylla said that he completely understood the USG position. "Don't forget, I am Dadis' opposition...I want him to go just as much as everyone else," he said.

¶17. (SBU) As Pol/Econ Chief was escorting Sylla out of the building, a member of the Embassy's contract guard force stopped Sylla and asked him for his business card, saying "Please sir, I would like to join your party."

COMMENT

¶18. (C) Sylla's utopian vision of how to move Guinea forward suggests that he does not have a solid understanding of the country's complex political dynamic. Although he is probably right about Guinea's economic potential, it will take a lot more than a "team of experts" to reverse the country's decades of mismanagement and graft. Pol/Econ Chief pointed out Guineans' traditional skepticism towards members of the Diaspora who return years later, an issue that Sylla quickly dismissed as being irrelevant. As unrealistic as his vision might be, it is important nonetheless because the CNDD may very well be hearing the same pitch, and possibly buying into parts if not all of it. Sylla may not have met with Dadis, but his name and that of his party's have been increasingly visible within CNDD circles over the past few months. Sylla's connections are still unclear, but he is emerging as a player of note. END COMMENT.
RASPOLIC